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Teach on Prayer Meetings

1825

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**RULES**  
FOR  
**THE BETTER REGULATION**  
OF  
**PRAYER-MEETINGS,**  
AMONG THE  
**Wesleyan Methodists :**  
WITH SUITABLE  
**DIRECTIONS TO PRAYER-LEADERS.**

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**BY WILLIAM LEACH.**

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“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”—**JAMES, v. 16.**  
“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit.”—**EPH. vi. 18.**

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*The Third Edition, Improved and Enlarged.*

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**1825.**

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THE following Rules and Directions were read to a number of my highly respected friends, who are employed in conducting Prayer-Meetings in this large and populous town, and are published at their unanimous request. The Rules are in general suited to the management of Prayer-Meetings in large towns, and where there are many persons employed in this good work; but a selection might be made from them which would suit smaller places. It is hoped, that this small pamphlet will, through the Divine Blessing, be rendered useful, not only to that class of Christians for whom it is more particularly designed, but to others also into whose hands it may be put. Should this be the case, the Author will ascribe all the praise to that God, from whom cometh every good and perfect gift.

W. L.

Sheffield,  
Feb. 25th, 1824. }

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## RULES.

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I. THE business of these Institutions shall be managed by a committee, consisting of — members, a president, and two secretaries, who shall meet once each month.

II. One month before the conclusion of each plan, there shall be a general meeting of all the prayer-leaders, when three of the old committee shall go out of office, and an equal number of persons be chosen to fill up their places.

III. The secretaries shall serve for one year, and then be re-elected, or new ones chosen.

IV. The superintendent preacher shall preside in the committee and general meetings, which he shall begin and conclude with prayer. He shall take the sense of the meeting by vote; prevent disorder; and in all respects see that the proper business of the meeting is attended to in the spirit of meekness and Christian love. Should he at any time be unable to attend a meeting of the committee, he shall appoint one of his brethren, a travelling preacher, to supply his place.

**V.** The plans shall be printed under the direction of the committee, and sold at as small a price as possible; and should there be any surplus of money at the end of the year, it shall be divided among the poorest and most aged of the prayer-leaders.

**VI.** The secretaries shall be present at each meeting of the committee, and at the general meetings. They shall assist in making the plans, receive and pay all monies, keep minutes of each meeting, and at the end of the year balance their accounts.

**VII.** No person shall be admitted on the plan as a prayer-leader until he has been mentioned and approved in the regular leaders' meeting of that Society of which he is a member.

**VIII.** No prayer-meeting shall be held at the house of any person who is not acknowledged as a pious and steady member of the Wesleyan Methodist Society, and whose family is not of good report in the neighbourhood where they reside.

**IX.** No individual member, or members of the committee, or of the leaders, shall on any occasion give up any meeting, or silence any one regularly employed, unless authorized by the committee, or superintendent of the circuit.

X. There shall be a love-feast once a year for the prayer-leaders, and the persons at whose houses the prayer-meetings are held, which shall be conducted by one of the travelling preachers, or in case of their absence, by one appointed by the superintendent.

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## DIRECTIONS.

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I. BE faithful in attending to your appointments. Never be absent from any place where you are expected, unless you are sick or at a distance from home; and in such cases do all you can to provide a substitute. This fidelity is necessary to the comfort and peace of your own mind. You have, from a conviction that it was your duty, undertaken this work, and no selfish or trifling thing should hinder you from a diligent and regular attendance at the places to which your plan directs you. This is of vast importance as it regards your companions in the work. If you are not there, you may occasion their hands to hang down, and through your non-attendance, and the effect of their discouragement, the meeting may fail to produce those good effects which it otherwise would have done, had it been well supported. If you can

possibly avoid it, never go to the house of prayer in haste. This would be injurious both to your body and mind, and inconsistent with the importance and solemnity of the work about which you are going. Go in the spirit of serious reflection, and let your mind be calm and recollected.

II. Strive to maintain an habitual sense of the Divine presence on your own minds at all times and in all places. "Thou, God, seest me," should be the language of your souls. Like Enoch, walk with God; and like David, "set the Lord always before you." "Keep yourselves unspotted from the world." Remember you are not of the world, you are of God: "you have taken it upon you to speak unto the Lord" in behalf of your families, the church, and the world. You ought to consider your office as a motive to greater and more uniform holiness. When you are in your daily occupations, and *unavoidably* in company with men of the world, remember you are *Christians*; and that you sustain an official character among the people of God. "See, then, that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil," Eph. v. 15, 16.

III. You should not only be outwardly circumspect, but inwardly devoted to God. "Keep your heart with all diligence;" "stir up the gift of God which is in you." 2 Tim. i. 6: let the sacred fire burn with strength and brightness on the altar of

your hearts; see that it never goes out. As a person who does not enjoy a sense of the Divine favour should not undertake a work of this kind, so he who has lost such sense of his favour is of course unfit for this sacred office. Are you “approved in Christ”—“accepted in the beloved?” Then remember, you “stand by faith,”—“live by faith,” please God by faith.” “But if you draw back from this way of living, He will have no pleasure in you.” Heb. x. 38. While we retain the spirit of adoption, we come to God as our Father. “If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God. And whatsoever we ask we receive of Him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.” 1 John iii. 21, 22.—“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” James v. 16.

IV. Endeavour at all times to approach the Throne of Grace under a deep sense of your past sinfulness and present unworthiness. Jesus Christ is the way, and we have no right, no access, but through the merit of his sacrifice and prevalent intercession. “In whom we have boldness, and access with confidence by the faith of Him.” Eph. iii. 5. Through our great High Priest, “let us come boldly to the Throne of Grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace, to help in time of need.” Heb. iv. 16. But let us remember that the “boldness” with which we are to come is entirely different from fearless presumption, or headlong

irreverence. It is not with a selfish or trifling freedom that we are to come before God. "He is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him." Psalm lxxxix, 7. Even under the Gospel dispensation we are to "have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with *reverence* and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire." Heb. xii, 28, 29. While we come with reverence, let us remember it is the "Throne of Grace" to which we are coming, and therefore we should come with filial confidence, with child-like boldness. It is the mercy-seat to which we are coming; not to the Throne of Judgment. It is to "Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than the blood of Abel." Heb. xii. 24.

V. Let it be your practice as often as possible, before you engage in public prayer, to enter into your closet, and there humble yourselves before God, and implore the help of the Holy Spirit, without whose immediate aid you cannot pray as you ought to pray. Rom. viii. 26. Your heavenly Father has promised his Holy Spirit to them that ask Him. Luke xi. 13. You would have but a low opinion of that Christian minister, who would come into the pulpit to conduct the public worship of God, without having first sought direction and assistance from his Divine Master in private. Is not your's a Divine work? Do not you need spe-

cial help and preparation from your Lord and Master? We honour God by frequently and fully acknowledging our entire dependence on his Holy Spirit while engaged in acts of worship especially. "God is a spirit, and they who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." John iv. 24. St. Paul exhorts the Ephesians to "pray with all prayer and supplication in the spirit." Eph vi. 18. "The effectual fervent prayer," which St. James mentions, signifies the inwrought prayer, or the prayer wrought or produced by the agency of the Holy Spirit. St. Jude exhorts those to whom he wrote his epistle to "pray in the Holy Ghost." v. 20.

VI. Guard against praying too long at one time. In prayer-meetings this is a great and common evil. It is in general unpleasant and unprofitable. There are few persons who are prepared to pray fifteen or twenty minutes without vain repetitions, which are offensive to God. Six or seven minutes is in general long enough. There are no doubt seasons when Christian ministers and others are led out under a special enlargement of heart, and an extension of their views of the goodness and mercy of God in Christ Jesus; and at such times it is right for them to protract their prayers and supplications with thanksgiving. But when there is nothing more than an ordinary feeling, it is better to be short. On some occasions there are but few persons to conduct a prayer-

meeting, and in such cases there may appear something like necessity for long prayers. But even then the more excellent way would be for the same persons to pray twice, rather than tire their hearers by one long prayer. As these meetings are in general held on the evening of the Lord's Day, and most of those who attend them have been at some place of worship once or twice before during the day, it is not judicious to continue together in general more than one hour. When this caution is not attended to, serious inconveniences will follow. The people will not only be tired in their attention, but women who have young children will be wanted at home, some of their domestic duties probably neglected; and those who have to attend family worship, when they find it is got so late, may be tempted to pass it by, or, at most, to attend to it in a loose and careless manner. Let it be our care to attend to one religious duty in such a way as not to neglect others of equal or of greater importance.

VII. To render prayer-meetings the more lively and interesting, there must be a proper attention paid to the singing. It would be well if each company of prayer-leaders had at least one person who understood music, so far as to be able to set tunes with propriety. To a thinking and well informed person it is disagreeable and even painful to hear a light and cheerful tune set to a solemn and awful hymn, and, on the contrary, to hear a dull heavy tune set to a hymn of praise, or one calculated to

promote holy joy in the hearts of pious people. As the mind is assisted by variety, it is not well to sing too long. Three or four verses in the beginning of the meeting, and at intervals during the service to give out two or three verses, will in general be better than giving out whole hymns. These verses should be appropriate and striking. In places where the people are ignorant and careless, it would be well to sing our solemn hymns on death and judgment; and where they are more intelligent and pious, those on prayer and intercession. It would be found a great advantage if those who are employed in conducting prayer-meetings, would have in their memory a number of suitable verses to be given out on different occasions. It often produces considerable anxiety and disappointment in the minds of the people, when they see a person turning over for a long time the pages of a Hymn Book, and cannot find what he wants; but in the end, and in his haste, makes an improper choice. Some persons may be ready to call these little things. To such we would give the words of the Apostle Paul, "Let not your good be evil spoken of." Rom. xiv. 16. "Let all things be done decently and in order." 1 Cor. xiv. 40.

VIII. Let all who consider it their duty to pray in public, diligently search the Holy Scriptures, that they may be well acquainted with those directions, precepts, and promises, which have a more immediate relation to this sacred duty. Let them

approach God as he has taught them, with his own words in their mouth, and his own spirit in their hearts; and then they shall be heard and answered. Some persons professing religion err in this, as in other duties, not knowing the Scriptures. Beside, there is something so simple, and yet so grand and appropriate, in the language of the Holy Scriptures, that it is infinitely more calculated to impress your own minds, and the minds of such as hear you, than any thing which you can utter of your own. A deep acquaintance with the Word of God will give a rich variety to your prayers. Out of the good treasure of your heart in this respect, you will bring forth the things which are good. "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs; singing with grace in your hearts unto the Lord." Col. iii. 16.

IX. It may be proper when you hold prayer-meetings in some parts of the country, where the people have not the regular ministry of the Word, and perhaps many of them totally ignorant of Divine truth, to read a portion of the sacred Scriptures. This might be done with much propriety in some parts of large manufacturing towns. Some of the Psalms would be proper on such occasions. Our Lord's sermon on the mount would be still more appropriate for such an audience. You might at such times turn the substance of what you read

into your prayer. Many are perishing for lack of knowledge. O seek, by all methods prudential and Divine, to promote the knowledge of Christ Jesus!

X. Carefully guard against all affectation in your public devotions. All unnatural tones of voice are highly improper. Whining and canting tones might work on the feelings of the weak and credulous among your fellow-creatures, but you should carefully avoid all such methods of address before Him who searcheth the heart. Be on your guard against all lofty and pompous expressions in your prayers. Let the simple language of your upright hearts be the language of your lips. Do not, under the idea of appearing zealous, affect in your manner and loudness of voice that which your state of mind does not warrant you in doing before God. Be jealous over yourselves with a godly jealousy. Do not offer strange fire on the sacred altar. Yet remember, if you live near to God, your prayers will not be cold or lifeless, but fervent and importunate. God will hear, and you and those that are with you shall feel that you have access unto the Throne of Grace.

XI. In all your devotional exercises, private and public, endeavour to keep the eye of your mind fixed on the great object of your worship. Recollect it is with Him that you have to do. By the grace of God you may say with the Psalmist, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed."

Psalm lvii. 7. Maintain a humble frame of mind. “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.” 1 Peter v. 5. “He filleth the poor with good things; while the rich are sent empty away.” Luke i. 53. “He that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” Luke xviii. 14. Let your faith be in exercise. Give full credit to the promises of the Gospel, and expect a present blessing. Watch against envy and all unholy jealousy. Learn to rejoice if another excels you, and is preferred before you. “In honour preferring one another.” Rom. xii. 10. We may be tempted with these unholy feelings, but let us resist the temptation. “And when the fowls came down upon the carcases, Abram drove them away.” Gen. xv. 11. By holy watchfulness and resolution, drive away all unholy thoughts and tempers, or they will spoil your sacrifice. Let your great care be to please God. Keep a single eye to his glory. “If therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body (the whole man) shall be full of light.” Matt. vi. 22.

XII. It becomes all Christians in these days to pray particularly for the success of the Gospel. The increasing knowledge which prevails respecting the awful state of the heathen world, the union and exertions of good men of all denominations in promoting the interests of Christianity, should excite in you the spirit of ardent, persevering prayer. It is in answer to prayer that the Spirit of God produces in the minds of the heathen a desire and

a disposition to receive the Gospel; that He touches the hearts of those who have property, so that they are willing to contribute to the support of the missionary cause. In answer to prayer He raises up and qualifies men to preach the everlasting Gospel to the heathen. He preserves them by sea and land to the places of their destination; and it is He and He only that gives success to their labours. You have the promise of God to encourage you. It is said of Messiah, that "all nations shall serve Him, men shall be blessed in Him, all nations shall call Him blessed." Psalm lxxii. 17. "All flesh shall come to Him that heareth prayer." Psalm lxv. ii. We are assured that "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." Isa. xi. 9. "All flesh shall see the glory of the Lord together." Isa. xl. 5. Our blessed Lord says, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." John xii. 32. The first three petitions of the Lord's prayer have reference to this work. "Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give Him no rest till He establish, and till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth." Isa. lxii. 6, 7. How strong are the expressions, and how loud is the call to the church of God, to be fervent and incessant in their cries to Him for the universal spread of the Gospel. The prophets very often speak of this work as that which shall be done in answer to prayer. Is. xxv. 9.; xxvi. 9, 12, 13, 16, 17; xxxiii. 2; xli. 17; xlvi. 24. Psalm cii. 13, 22. Hos. v. 15; xiv. 2, to the end,

Zech. x. 6; xii. 10. O, then, pray,—“ Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us; and establish Thou the work of our hands upon us, yea, the work of our hands, establish Thou it.” Psalm xc. 16, 17.

XIII. The practice of saying Amen is in itself proper, and agreeable to the Word of God. It signifies *so be it*, or *let it be so*.—Lord, grant us our petitions. It should be used at the conclusion of the sentence, that it may not interrupt the person who is praying, or those who would hear. It should be the result of our deliberate judgment and approbation of the petition offered up to God. The following are the words of an old Divine on this subject:—“ The ordinary way and the best for people to express their consent when a person is praying, is with a distinct and audible voice to say Amen. This was commanded, Deut. xxvii. 15. It is a sound well beseeming the public worship of God, to make the place ring again with the joint Amen of the people. The Jews uttered this word with great ardency, and, therefore, used to double it, saying, Amen, Amen. “ And Ezra blessed the Lord the great God: and all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands; and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces toward the ground.” Neh. viii, 6.

